

Understanding Self Through Portraiture

Based on the project **Life After Life in Prison: The Bedroom Project**, exhibited at Photoville from September 13-23, 2018 in Brooklyn Bridge Park

Students will reflect on a difficult time in their lives when they had to overcome adversity, using photography and text to represent their experience.

Students will be able to:

- Develop a coherent personal narrative with details and sequencing.
- Conceptualize and take an environmental self portrait.
- Create a final presentation that integrates photos and text into a personal narrative.

Session 1: Intro

1. Show students images from the Life After Life in Prison Image Bank, and conduct a VTS discussion about the image. Depending on your class structure, show a few examples, or select one image per class session.
 - What's going on in this picture?
 - What do you see that makes you say that?
 - What more can we find?
2. Variation: Instead of a verbal VTS discussion, you may print out copies of the image and ask students to write directly on the image.
 - What's going on in this picture?
 - What do you see that makes you say that?
 - What more can we find?
 - Encourage students to circle, underline, mark up the image with what stands out to them.
3. Provide students with the text that the woman wrote to accompany the portrait, and discuss as a class.
 - What were your initial observations about the images? How did your understanding of the image change after you read the text?

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Featuring photography by Sara Bennett

Grade Level: 7th - 12th grade

Subjects: Art, Photography, Social Studies, English Language Arts, Journalism/ Photojournalism, Social and Criminal Justice, Civil Rights

Time Required: 7 sessions

Key Images:

- [Life After Life in Prison Image Bank](#)

Materials Needed:

- Camera or cell phone
- Paper
- Computers
- Pens
- VTS Discussion Questions

Standards Addressed:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.3
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.1

Additional Resources:

photoville.com/edu

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- What is the tone of the text? What are some things that these women are grateful for
 - This is one part of their story. What questions do you have about the rest of their story?
4. Depending on your class, build in instruction about the parole system and sentencing and how that's connected to mass incarceration.
 - What do you know about mass incarceration?
 - What questions do you have about it?
 - How do you hear it discussed in the media and in your communities? What is left out of this conversation?
 - How does mass incarceration impact people's lives?
 5. Ask your students to think about a difficult time in their life when they had to overcome adversity. This could be related to prison, but certainly does not have to. It can be anything personal of their choosing. Depending on the age and population of your students, how you might frame and discuss this prompt will differ.
 6. Ask your students to come to the next class session with this experience in mind. Tell them that they will be working on a photography project around this experience.
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Session 2: Narrative Plan

1. Students will end up with 10 photos that illustrate how they picked up the pieces and overcame adversity. The 10 photos must include one environmental self-portrait and 9 supporting photos.
 2. Have students think through where they want to take their environmental self-portrait. This should be somewhere that was a space of comfort during this time.
 3. Brainstorm the content of the supporting photos. These photos can be a landscape of a place that reminds them of what they came through, a still life of a symbolic object etc. Make a list of the SPACES, ITEMS, PEOPLE and ACTIVITIES that gave them strength, encouragement and perseverance.
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Session 3 & 4: Camera Basics / Shooting

1. Select a new image from the Life After Life in Prison Image Bank photos and discuss:
 - What can you say about this person's background and personality from this image? Can you tell: where they are from? How they feel? Students should ground their observations in objects/elements they see in the photo. What do you see that makes you say that?
 - As students talk about the portrait, introduce key tools of portraiture such as lighting, background, expression, posture, line of sight, scale.

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2. Depending on the focus and resources available in your classroom, decide on the technology students will use to capture images. (Film, digital, cell phone or working in groups) Review photography basics with your students, including basic camera skills and composition.
 3. Refer to THE FENCE 2018 Guide for an intro to photography styles and The Photoville Passport for helpful vocabulary.
 4. Send students out to capture at least 20 photos based on their brainstorm.
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Session 5: How to Listen / Peer Review

1. Review with your students guidelines and helpful questions for peer review and critique.
2. Rules and Guidelines
 - Respect the artist and their personal story.
 - Only one person should be speaking at any time. Use active listening.
 - An artist can decide not to answer a question if they are uncomfortable sharing.
3. Pair students to review each other's work.
 - Begin the review by asking the artist to share about their work, and the most important themes they want to communicate about their experience.
 - Remind the reviewer to actively listen to the artist. Take note of something they like, something they wonder and something they wish.
 - Have the reviewer share their feedback with the artist in the form of three stations.
 - I like....
 - I wonder...
 - I wish....
4. Based on feedback they received, students should work individually to edit their image selection down to 5 to 10 images.

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Session 6: Writing

1. Have students reflect on the experience of taking, and sharing photos. Provide a few prompts and give them 15 minutes to free write about the experience. Sample prompts:
 - What did you learn about yourself through this experience?
 - What did you enjoy about this project?
 - What is most important for you to communicate about your experience?
 - What is your story about?
 2. Have them edit down their free-write to a one paragraph statement. Ask them to write this out to accompany their environmental self-portrait.
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Session 7: Final Presentation

1. Provide space for students to share their work through a culminating event such as a gallery walk or final presentation.
 2. If your class has been exploring the theme of mass incarceration, provide space to reflect on this issue -- how they may have been personally affected and how their perception has shifted.
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Resources about Mass Incarceration:

- [Prison Policy](#)
 - [Sentencing Project](#)
 - [Prison Photography](#)
 - [The Marshall Project](#)
 - Podcast: [Earhustle](#)
 - [American Injustice](#)
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